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A packet-based protocol includes data flow control signals for efficient transmission of data on various interconnects, including high speed parallel and serial interconnects. The packet protocol also enables routing of data in large systems or across standard video and computing networks. The packet protocol is data independent and permits sharing of different types of video data over a common interconnect and system design. The packet protocol also offers a flexible method for routing data between devices. Command data also may be sent between devices using this protocol. Using this packet protocol, any data storage or data processing device also may operate as a switch and may implement data flow control over its input and output interconnects. Flow controlled data transfer may be implemented using this protocol in a manner that is independent of the transport medium of the interconnect.